





*Du Fu [杜甫]  
with  
his Last Pilgrim*

**Art Aeon**

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*Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer* (2020)\*  
*Du Fu [杜甫] with his Last Pilgrim* (2020)\*

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**Dedicated to  
my revered Chinese poets:**

**Dù Fǔ [杜 甫] (712-770),  
Wáng Wéi [王 維] (701 -761),  
Lǐ Bái [李 白] (701-762),  
and  
Táo Yuān Míng [陶 淵 明] (365–427).**

They have nurtured and inspired me  
to sing of their sublime poetry in this plain song.

## Synopsis

### *Du Fu [杜甫] with his Last Pilgrim*

is a fictional narrative poem about the poetry and life of Dù Fǔ [杜甫] (712-770), the great Chinese poet, revered as the ‘Poet-Saint.’

It unfolds imaginary dialogues between Du Fu and a fictional character, called ‘*Bright Moon*’: An earnest young admirer of Du Fu, who visits the sick, frail poet stranded on his worn boat-hut adrift the Yangtze River on his final day.

Entreated by *Bright Moon*, who wishes to be his new pupil, Du Fu reminisces about his happy youth, how he studied poetry, and recites classic poems of Lǐ Bái [李白] (701-762), Wáng Wéi [王維] (701-761), and Táo Yuān Míng [陶淵明] (365-427) for his new pupil to appreciate.

Du Fu relates to the new pupil his indignations, frustrations, agonies, and utter despairs on vile corrupted rulers and his sincere and compassionate sympathy for the helpless, innocent common people by recounting his own experiences, which he had bravely revealed in his heart-rending and moving ballads.

Suddenly, sick and frail Du Fu collapses and swoons. When he recovers, he relates his mysterious dream to his elated pupil: Li Bai came to see Du Fu on his boat; they celebrated their blissful reunion by exchanging poetic chants. The full moon was rising on the Yangtze River. Unexpectedly, Li Bai jumped off the skiff, as if he tried to soar up to the moon. Then Du Fu awoke from the strange dream. When he finishes recalling his dream, a bright shooting star falls. Du Fu blesses *Bright Moon* to write pure earnest poems deep from his heart and soul and gently passes away in peace.



## Prologue

The present work is a fictional narrative poem about the final day of the character *Du Fu*. It is based on the poems and biography of the historic poet, **Dù Fǔ [杜甫]** (712-770): the great Chinese poet of the T'ang Dynasty, revered as the 'poet-saint' in the long history of the Chinese poetry. A pithy gist of this fiction is as follows:

- [1] An earnest young man, called *Bright Moon*, took long hard adventures to find the old, gravely sick Du Fu, helplessly stranded on his worn-out boat-hut adrift the Yangtze River on his final day. When he finds Du Fu at last, *Bright Moon* presents him with a sheet of old paper. In a pleasant surprise, Du Fu finds one of his old poems written on it in his own handwriting. He recalls that he was inspired to write the poem after beholding an exquisite and moving performance of an artistic dancer, called *White Lotus*, at a festival held by the Imperial Court in Chang An.
- [2] *Bright Moon* confesses that he is a love-child of *White Lotus*. She kept the Du Fu's poem, and cherished it as the most precious treasure in her life.

When *White Lotus* was compelled to serve  
the chief of the rebel army during the An  
Lushan Rebellion, she refused it by hanging  
herself.

- [3] *Bright Moon* entreats his revered poet to teach him poetry. He also asks Du Fu whether he is his real father, whom *Bright Moon* has yearned to find all his life. Du Fu says that he is not *Bright Moon*'s father in the flesh, but he will take him as his pupil as they share the same spirit and love for poetry. Du Fu offers *Bright Moon* his poems to read and to copy whichever he likes.
- [4] Du Fu reminisces about his own youth as a young poet-scholar; he recalls his cherished memories of his happy, creative days and his carefree adventures to famous scenic and historic sites, and meeting with his revered friend: the great poet Lǐ Bái [李 白 ] (701-762). Du Fu recites Li Bai's poems and asks *Bright Moon* to comment on and appreciate each. He introduces the poems on nature by Táo Yuān Míng [陶 淵 明 ] (365-427), and Wáng Wéi [王 維 ] (701 -761) for his new pupil to learn their poetic artistry.

- [5] When *Bright Moon* asks Du Fu about his life and career in Chang An, the earnest conscientious poet vents his indignations, frustrations, agonies, and utter despairs on vile corrupted rulers. He asserts his sincere and compassionate sympathy for the helpless, innocent common people by recounting his own experiences, which he had bravely published in his heart-rending and moving ballads.
- [6] Du Fu asks the strange new pupil to tell about his eventful life. *Bright Moon* confesses his dire vicissitudes: He was a poor orphan, who worked hard as a servant to a nobleman in Chang An. He fell in love with his master's daughter, called *Red Rose*. Suddenly, he was conscripted to fight at the Tibetan frontier. *Bright Moon* was wounded and captured; fortunately, he was rescued by a compassionate Tibetan army officer. When the officer finished his military duty, he returned to his Buddhist monastery in Tibet. *Bright Moon* followed his saviour, and devoted himself to learn painting and poetry as the way to enlightenment for many years in Tibet. He visited the chaotic Chang An and found his beloved *Red Rose* dead. On his way back to his new home in Tibet, he came to Chengdu, and then sailed down the Yangtze River to look for Du Fu, whom he believed to be his unknown father.

[7] Suddenly, frail Du Fu collapses and swoons.  
When he recovers, he relates his mysterious  
dream to his elated pupil: Li Bai came to see  
Du Fu on his boat; they celebrated their blissful  
reunion by exchanging poetic chants. The bright  
full moon was rising on the Yangtze River.  
Unexpectedly, Li Bai jumped off the skiff, as if he  
tried to soar up to the moon. When Du Fu finishes  
recalling his dream, a bright shooting star falls  
nearby, stunning the meek pupil. Du Fu blesses  
*Bright Moon* to write pure earnest poems deep from  
his heart and soul and gently passes away in peace.

Although this story is merely imaginations,  
the historical and biographical episodes, spoken  
by the character *Du Fu*, or the classic poems,  
recited by *Du Fu* for his pupil, *Bright Moon*,  
have been based on the original Chinese texts  
of the poems, written by the historical poet  
*Dù Fǔ* [杜甫] (712-770), or by other relevant  
Chinese poets: Lǐ Bái [李白] (701-762),  
Wáng Wéi [王維] (701-761), and  
Táo Yuān Míng [陶淵明] (365-427).

As for their references and some relevant  
discussions, see the **Epilogue**.

*Du Fu [杜甫]  
with  
his Last Pilgrim*

*A Narrative Poem  
in the Quaternary Stanza*

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*Between sheer, stark cliffs  
amid high, endless mountain ranges  
Yangtze River gushes  
towards the very edges of sky.* 4

*The autumn deepens  
along colourful riverbanks.  
The setting sun gleams  
on the grand mystic river.* 8

*All creatures return  
to their own homes in deep woods.  
Sad cries of gibbons  
rend poor, homeless vagrants' hearts.* 12

*A worn boat-hut clings  
to perilous riverbanks.  
Surging waves threaten  
to break off its fragile ties.* 16

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*A frail old man rests  
on its bare, desolate deck.  
Gazing intently  
at glorious calm sunset,* 20  
*he muses on his life  
teemed with dire ill-fated miseries.  
He sighs in anguishes:*  
*‘May I see again my beloved* 24  
*family ere I die.’*  
*A ship sails down the river.  
The boatman shouts aloud:*  
*‘We’re looking for an old man,* 28  
*who sailed from Chengdu  
on a worn boat-hut down this  
Long River. Your boat  
looks like his, I guess.’ ‘Do you* 32

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

know his name?’ asks *Du Fu*  
*in surprise. A passenger*  
*on the ship shouts out:*

‘Du Fu! Our revered poet!’ 36

‘That hapless forlorn  
Vagrant—Du Fu—here you see,’  
*says the frail old man.*

‘Ah, I’m glad that we’ve found you, 40  
at last, after hard  
struggling in search for you  
along long riverbanks.

This gentleman persisted that we 44  
must find you at all costs,’  
*says the boatman, docking with*  
*Du Fu’s worn boat-hut.*

*The elated passenger comes* 48



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*to meet his revered  
poet and kneels courteously  
bowing to Du Fu.*

‘Welcome strange young voyager!’ 52

*says Du Fu, ‘let me  
know who you are and wherefrom.*

Why have you troubled  
yourself to visit worthless 56

Du Fu, an utter  
failure in this harsh, hard world?’

*Trembling in awe  
and thrills, the elated voyager 60*

*presents Du Fu with  
an old sheet of paper to read.*

‘I wonder how you  
obtained this old poem in 64

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

my own hand-writing?’  
*asks Du Fu in pleasant surprise.*  
‘It was the last gift  
from my dear mother.’ ‘Who is 68  
your mother? I wrote  
this poem, deeply inspired  
by a lady’s dance  
at a festival, held at 72  
Imperial Court in  
Chang An,’ *says Du Fu, in fond*  
*memory.* ‘Your poem  
keeps her artistry alive deep 76  
in my heart. My mother  
loved poetry; she read me  
poems since I was young;  
She encouraged me to write 80

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

simple, earnest poems,’  
*says the man in tears.* ‘What is  
the name of your wise  
artistic mother? I presented 84  
this poem to the prince  
to thank him for his invitation:  
A destitute scholar  
begging for an appointment 88  
in Imperial Court,  
but all in vain,’ *says Du Fu.*  
‘She was called *White Lotus.*  
The prince gave her your poem, 92  
I guess, as a gift  
for her moving performance.  
She cherished your poem  
as the most precious treasure 96

### *Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

in her life,' *says the man.*

‘You are the son of *White Lotus*!’

Who is your noble sire?’

'I don't know who is my real

100

father. When the Rebel

Army compelled my mother

to serve their chief, she

refused it by hanging herself,'

104

*says the man in agony.*

‘O, what a heroic end

of righteous, gracious,

and patriotic *White Lotus*!

108

Her noble spirit

should be exalted in poems,'

*says Du Fu, gently*

*comforting the weeping man.*

112

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘I did not know what  
happened to my missed mother  
while I was growing up  
at her younger sister’s home; 116

Soon after her death,  
my aunt brought me up with her  
own children with love.

When I returned to Chang An 120

this spring after my  
twelve years’ venture in Tibet,  
I visited my dear aunt;

She revealed the tragedy 124

of my mother’s death,  
and gave me a silk envelope,  
which my mother entrusted  
her to keep till I grew up. 128

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

It contained two most  
sacred and precious treasures:  
One is your poem;  
Another is my mother's  
last letter to me.' 132

*Elated in ineffable  
emotions, the man  
presents Du Fu with the letter.* 136

'I will read this aloud  
so that you can hear your wise  
mother's loving voice.

*"To my Beloved Son, Bright Moon:* 140

*You are the son of  
a true poet of conscience.  
In heaven, I will  
always pray for you to sing* 144

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*deep from your pure soul  
to move your own heart. Ignore  
what the crowd prattles on;  
Listen to what your conscience* 148  
*confides to yourself.  
Your loving mother, White Lotus.”*  
Her wise true voice takes  
my breath away in veneration,’ 152  
*says Du Fu, deeply  
moved in tears. ‘As you’ve affirmed  
that you’re the very poet  
who wrote the poem, I wish* 156  
*to confirm my dream  
that you are my real father,  
whom I’ve yearned to find,  
and serve with love heart and soul,’* 160

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*says the elated man,  
trembling in excitement.*

‘In the flesh, I’m not  
your father. Just once, I saw 164

*White Lotus* dancing;  
I’ve never met her in person.

But I embrace you  
as my beloved son, *Bright Moon*, 168  
as we share the same  
spirit and love for poetry.

Merciful heaven  
must have sent you to bless me 172  
at the end of this  
journey of my paltry life.

How deeply I yearn  
to meet with the sublime lady, 176



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*White Lotus* in heaven!  
Did you write poems to exalt  
her lofty spirit?' *says*  
*Du Fu with warm compassion.* 180  
    'On her new gravestone  
I inscribed a childish cry  
of my heartfelt love:  
    "*Pure White Lotus has faded away* 184  
    *into the mystic realm*  
    *of no return; Yet her love*  
    *lives ever afresh deep*  
    *in my heart. Transcending dark* 188  
    *gulfs between the dead*  
    *and the quick, may I sing of*  
    *her noble, warm, loving*  
    *spirit."* But I couldn't fulfill 192

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

my earnest vow as  
I lacked any proper training  
in poetry. You are  
my revered poet of conscience. 196

Your poems move me  
deep to feel your compassion  
for all humanity:

They comfort my heart, and uplift 200  
my spirit. Please teach me  
the art of true poetry.

I wish to serve you  
as a devoted pupil-servant,' 204

*says the man in earnest.*

‘What you plead moves me deeply.

But I’m too sick and frail  
to teach you, my dear *Bright Moon*,’ 208

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*sighs Du Fu.* ‘My mother  
called me *Bright Moon*, hoping that  
her son may become  
a poet, shining like the moon. 212

But I feel myself  
too worthless to be called by  
such a pompous name.’

‘My dear *Bright Moon*, your gracious 216  
mother must have been  
inspired by keen, wise insight.

How can I help you  
pursue your love of poetry?’ 220

‘I wish to peruse  
the whole collection of your  
poems,’ *says Bright Moon*,  
‘so that I may breathe in your 224

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

true artistic spirit.'

*Du Fu raises his frail old body,  
and brings out a worn*

*wooden chest:* 'This contains what 228

I've written recently.

You may read and make copies  
of anything you like  
to keep with you, my dear son.' 232

'Thank you, my father,  
This is the day of my rebirth!

First of all, I wish  
to persuade you to return 236

to your family;

It is too risky to sail on  
this poor worn-out boat.

On our way, we met briefly 240

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

your family; they were  
so afraid that you had been drowned.  
I will send the boatman  
to tell them that you are alive. 244

May I stay with you here  
tonight, and let the boatman  
bring a larger ship  
and strong crews to tow this boat 248

back to where your dear  
family yearns to see you again?’  
‘My dear son *Bright Moon*,  
I repent my fatal mistakes. 252

Please bring me back to  
my family!’ *begs Du Fu*.  
‘I wish to bring your whole  
family back to your cherished 256

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*Thatched Cottage in Chengdu!*  
*says the sincere, thoughtful pilgrim.*

‘How could you perform  
such a miracle, *Bright Moon?*’ 260

‘It’s only a dream yet;  
I should go back to Tibet  
to persuade my wise,  
merciful patron for support. 264

For now, I must send  
the boatman to tell your family  
that you will rejoin them  
as soon as possible,’ *says* 268  
*the excited pilgrim.*

*Soon, he and the boatman bring*  
*plenty of foods, wines,*  
*and necessities to the boat-hut.* 272

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘I will tell your wife  
to get ready for your homecoming,’  
*says the boatman, and sails*  
*away into the serene sunset.* 276

*When they’ve enjoyed the meal,*  
*Du Fu asks his new pupil:*  
‘I wonder how you’ve sailed  
through your eventful hard life.’ 280

‘Since age ten, I worked  
as a diligent servant  
of a nobleman.  
Somehow, my master saw in me 284

eager innate love  
for poetry; he sent me to  
nearby schools to learn  
how to write and encouraged me 288

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

to compete at local  
poetry contests. It happened  
that sometimes my poems  
were chosen as the winning one. 292

My master was proud  
of me.' 'I would like to hear  
one of your best poems.'

*The elated pupil recites* 296  
*in awe and excitement:*

‘ “A Heron  
*A lone heron alights*  
*on empty pristine seashores* 300  
*at serene sunset*  
*in deep colourful autumn.*

*It sits so still like*  
*a mythical bird, poising* 304



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*in a vivid painting  
of a strange ethereal realm.  
What does it ponder  
in such a profound pensive mood?* 308  
*Time seems to repose  
in my inner eternity.”*  
I still remember  
that impressive lone heron, 312  
    musing in my heart.’  
‘I feel too, as if I saw  
your mystic heron  
in me. How did you learn to 316  
    write such deep feelings?’  
*asks Du Fu.* ‘I do not know;  
Whenever I strive  
to write, my mother’s wise voice 320

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resounds with my heartbeat,'  
*says the pupil.* 'You have your  
immanent teacher:  
Your pure conscience!' *says Du Fu,* 324  
*embracing him with*  
*warm fatherly love. The eager*  
*pupil asks his mentor:*  
'Please teach me the first basic 328  
steps to enter the realm  
of poetry.' 'To attain  
wisdom,' *says Du Fu,*  
'one must devote oneself in 332  
studying the classics.  
True literature lasts forever  
for us to learn in-depth.  
Various poets wrote diverse 336

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

forms; yet the artistic  
spirit of poetry does not  
depend on mere chances:  
First, the great ancient bards of Ch'u 340  
rose; then tedious spans  
of dark ages lingered on before  
the classic masters  
of Han rose; they were vanguards 344  
who took the fortress  
by storm. They set up the laws  
of poetry; others  
merely adorned them. Later 348  
poets kept them with  
respect, yet each era creates  
something new to the art  
of poetry.' 'How did you 352

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

find the way to write  
in your unique mode?' *asks*  
*the pupil*. 'My models  
are of the Confucian school: 356

I've dedicated myself  
to them since my youth. I was  
inspired by brilliant  
Chin poets. I tried to venture 360

on the deep mystery  
of non-being, which was transmitted  
in abstruse cryptic  
writings. What I've built is merely 364

a sketchy scaffolding;  
I still lack a firm complete  
form in my writing.  
Most of my poetry is 368

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

about private affairs  
for self-consolation in  
my long illness, and  
endless hapless wanderings. 372

I'm ashamed of myself  
unable to serve my country  
with wise counsels. Justice,  
peace, and prosperity vanished: 376

Rebellions, invasions,  
and gory cruel wars ravage  
endlessly. No more  
can I write magnificent lines 380

of our glorious past;  
Dire desolations I sigh in  
my poems when sad  
melancholy overwhelms my helpless, 384

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desperate aching heart.’  
‘Please tell me how you grew up,’  
*says the pupil*, ‘during  
the glorious era of powerful 388  
T’ang Empire; Cherished  
memories of your youth uplift  
your spirit, I hope.’  
‘Very well, *Bright Moon*,’ *says Du Fu*, 392  
‘it will relieve me  
from anguishes to re-live afresh  
the exciting carefree  
adventures I enjoyed in 396  
my youth. Poetry  
has been the distinction of  
our family. The *Du* clan  
has yielded many men of virtue 400

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and accomplishment  
since time ancient; my grandfather  
was respected as one  
of the four foremost men of 404  
letter of his era.  
My father was the assistant  
prefect of Yen-chu:  
He provided me with the best 408  
Education. In my  
seventh year, I thought of lofty  
heroic deeds; my first  
song was on the harbinger 412  
of good sagacious rule,  
entitled *The Phoenix*.  
In my ninth year,  
I practiced calligraphy in 416

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superb characters;  
My writings filled a large bag.  
In my fourteenth year,  
I ventured to the arena 420  
of poetry contests.  
Our living masters judged that  
I resembled the revered  
masters of the antiquity. 424  
Shunning vain, careless  
young crowds, I associated with  
good, wise, learnt elders:  
We mused on the universal truth, 428  
dispelling vulgar  
worldliness into oblivion.  
In my nineteenth year,  
I took long journeys to Su-chu; 432



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Visiting renowned  
historic sites, I witnessed  
endless changes in fickle  
fortunes through our long history. 436

The breathtaking beauty  
of nature along Yen Gorge inspired me  
with awe and wonder.

The graceful girls of Yueh-chou 440  
enchanted my young heart.

I hoped to sail further east  
by sea to explore  
Japan, but I had to end 444  
the trip with regret.

In my twenty-third year,  
I was chosen to take  
the imperial examination. 448

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

As I had perused  
over ten thousand books of classics,  
I feared no rivals  
among many competing scholars 452  
nor any difficult  
problems to solve. In spite of  
such efforts, I failed  
in bitter disappointment. 456  
My generous father,  
however, supported me in taking  
further adventures  
to vast regions of Ch'i and Chao. 460  
Riding good smart horses  
and clothed in fine furs, I sang of  
famous scenic sites:  
I hunted in deep woods, whistled 464

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for fast falcons, chased  
wild animals, and let my horse  
gallop while I dispatched  
arrows; each stretch of my arm 468  
brought down a flying stork  
or crane. During those eight years  
of my lively freedom,  
I wandered in the wide world 472  
to see and learn things  
most meaningful in my life.  
I visited many famous  
places and met with important 476  
people, most of all,  
Li Bai; travelling with him  
was most exciting  
and inspiring experiences.' 480

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*says Du Fu with deep*  
*emotion.* ‘I heard of his fame  
as a great poet,  
but I know little of who 484  
he is. Please tell me  
about mysterious Li Bai,’  
*says the thrilled pupil.*  
‘Li Bai was a poetic 488  
genius; his verses soar up,  
transcending our mundane world.  
His thrilling poems  
inspire us with vital verve. 492  
I’ve been so lonesome,  
since he left this world eight years ago,’  
*says Du Fu in tears.*  
‘It deeply moves me to learn 496

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

about such a noble  
friendship between you: two of  
our greatest poets.  
Please teach me the quintessence 500  
of his poetry  
as I am so ignorant,’  
*pleads the meek pupil.*  
‘Didn’t your wise mother teach you 504  
Li Bai’s celebrated  
poems?’ *asks Du Fu in surprise.*  
‘No. I wonder why  
you look puzzled,’ *says the pupil.* 508  
‘Li Bai fell in love  
with *White Lotus* while he worked  
in Chang An;’ *says Du Fu,*  
‘I surmised that he might have 512

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sired you; if so your  
mother should have taught you his  
poems as your lofty  
spiritual heritage, *Bright Moon.*' 516

'I wish to learn,' says  
*the pupil, trembling in awe,*  
'Li Bai's great poems,  
no matter who he would be 520  
to me. Please recite  
some of his poems for me  
to appreciate his  
poetic spirit,' says *the pupil.* 524

'It is difficult,'  
says *Du Fu*, 'which ones to choose  
from his many superb  
poems; let us try some that 528

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

may be pertinent:

“ Ballad of Traveling Merchant

*Sea voyagers ride on heaven's winds.*

*Aboard sturdy ships, they journey far away.* 532

*Like birds flying into clouds,*

*Once gone, they leave no trace.”*

What do you think of

this quatrain sung by Li Bai?’ 536

‘How vividly he

portrays my lot!’ *says the pupil,*

‘An ephemeral froth

drifting on the mystic sea of time; 540

Once gone, no trace of

this fleeting shade of nobody

shall linger on earth.

His terse, simple, and subtle 544

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

poem reminds me  
of who I am in this world.’  
‘Very well, *Bright Moon*,’ smiles

*Du Fu*, ‘the poem makes us  
reflect on ourselves.

The next one is entitled:

“ White Heron

*A white heron descends on autumn water.* 552  
*She flies lonely like frosts come down.*  
*Her mind is free from care and worry.*  
*She stands still all alone on the sandy shore.”*

Do you see your heron in  
his poem?’ ‘Yes, far

more vivid and spontaneous!’  
*exclaims the pupil.*

‘Spontaneity,’ says *Du Fu*, 560



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘that’s what makes Li Bai’s  
poems so fresh and vital.

Next, let us hear how

Li Bai sings of lofty mountains: 564

“ Meditation in Veneration Mountain

*Birds have flown up high—all gone.*

*A lone cloud floats free in leisure.*

*Never bored to gaze at each other;* 568

*Only you exist, Veneration Mountain!’”*

Do you see the lone poet

in deep meditation?’

‘I see how mysteriously 572

Li Bai sublimates

himself to become one with

his revered mountain!’

*says the pupil in elation.* 576

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘Good. Next poem is

his seven-character quatrain:

“ Looking up Heaven Gate Mountain

*Heaven Gate opens; Grand River bursts out.* 580

*Gusts of lush water make here abrupt turns.*

*Along sheer riverbanks loom green mountains.*

*A lone skiff sails on the edge of daylight.”*

Do you see the poet amid 584

the grand panorama?’

says *Du Fu*. ‘Yes, I see Li Bai

aboard a mystic skiff,

singing of sublime beauty 588

of nature in trance!’

says *the pupil with delight*.

‘Now hear how Li Bai

claims to touch stars in the sky: 592

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

“ Dedicated to Peak Summit Temple  
*Tonight, I stay at Peak Summit Temple;  
Raising hands, I caress countless stars.  
Do not dare to speak in full voice,* 596  
*lest you may disturb Heavenly Beings.”*  
Try to climb up high to reach  
Peak Summit Temple,  
and read this poem inscribed 600  
on its wall, *Bright Moon,*  
*says Du Fu.* ‘Caressing stars  
with his raised hands? What  
a fantastic bloating, yet 604  
it makes his poem  
so lively with vibrant verve!’  
*exclaims the pupil.*  
‘Li Bai’s poetic conceit,’ 608

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

says *Du Fu*, ‘excites us  
to imagine something mystic.  
Let’s hear his excuse

to himself as a hermit:

612

“ Question and Answer in Mountains  
*Asked why I dwell in green mountains,*  
*I smile, without answer, rapt in peace.*  
*Peach petals fade away on singing rills;*  
*This is a realm beyond the world of man.”*

616

Li Bai attained his ideal  
realm in nature, not  
in cruel din of man’s world.’

620

‘I wonder why he  
bothered to work at Imperial  
Court in hectic Chang An,’  
*asks the pupil.* ‘He suffered

624

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

old fatal diseases  
of self-contradiction as  
much as I did;' *says*  
*Du Fu in pangs of agony,* 628  
    'ambitions to serve  
our country for lofty duty  
of patriotism,  
in dire contradiction to 632  
    our innate yearning  
to live as recluses far away  
from worldly affairs.'  
    'What was his task in the Court?' 636  
    *asks the pupil.* 'Li Bai  
was abused to be a witty  
entertainer to amuse  
the emperor and his brazen 640

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

paramour with fake  
flattery; he was expelled  
from the Court as a poor  
victim of blatant intrigues,' 644  
*says Du Fu in bitter*  
*indignation.* 'How did he  
take his misfortune?  
Did it affect his poetry?' 648  
*asks the pupil.* 'Yes!  
Li Bai became sentimental;  
He tried to escape  
from the cruel reality 652  
of our woeful world,  
indulging in drinking wine.  
Listen to his sad  
heartbreaking song of drinking: 656

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

“Drinking alone in Moonlight  
*Amid flowers a jug of wine*  
*I drink alone; no friends to share.*  
*Raising the cup, I invite the bright moon* 660  
*and my shadow, thus making up three.*  
*The moon knows nothing of drinking;*  
*My shadow just mimics my body.*  
*With the moon and my shadow as friends* 664  
*I exult in bliss till spring fulfils itself:*  
*I sing; the moon strolls.*  
*I dance; my shadow reels.*  
*Sober, we share our joys.* 668  
*Drunk, each goes his own way.*  
*Unified forever without attachment,*  
*we will meet again in the Milky Way.”*  
*This is the first, and the best* 672

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

I think, of his four songs  
with the same title. Do you  
perceive profound changes  
in Li Bai's poetry?' *says* 676

*Du Fu in pensive voice.*

'Yes. I see how hard he strove  
to flee from reality.

Had he achieved his ideals 680  
before he left this world?'

*asks the pupil.* 'No. He ended  
his life in dire miseries,  
wrongly accused of treason!' 684

*says Du Fu in anguish.*

'It breaks my heart,' *says* Bright Moon  
*in tears,* 'to learn that  
Li Bai suffered such awful 688



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

tragedies despite  
his superb poetic genius.  
You have awakened me  
to look into what's beyond 692  
the enigmatic man.  
Someday, I will peruse all  
of Li Bai's superb  
poems. For now, please resume 696  
relating your life  
to me as I made you digress  
so far away. When did  
you move to Chang An? How did 700  
you fare in seeking  
your career there?' 'In my thirty-  
fourth year,' says *Du Fu*,  
'I went there to seek a post 704

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

at Imperial Court;  
I offered my literary works  
to proud dignitaries  
in their conceited pretensions. 708

For ten years, I strove  
but all in vain; dire poverty  
brought humiliation,  
anguishes, miseries, and despairs. 712

To join with my poor  
family, separated in  
Feng-hsien, I left Chang An  
at midnight in bitter cold 716

winter. At dawn, I  
passed by Hua-ching Palace where  
Emperor Min indulged  
in luxury and debauchery: 720

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

The precious silks used  
by his extravagant harem  
were woven by hapless  
women; brutal officers 724  
beat their helpless husbands  
to extort the tribute for Court.  
His vile greedy ministers  
breached the basic principles 728  
of just governing.  
Many upright talented men fled  
from Court in dismay.  
Imperial treasures were hoarded 732  
by upstart royal  
relatives; air of perfumes moved  
with enticing figures.  
Behind their rich gates, wines were 736

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

left sour, meats to rot;  
While just outside these gates lay  
stark bones of the starved,  
frozen, good common people! 740

Just a foot apart were  
the thriving and the withered;  
It rent my heart to face  
such brutal facts so helplessly. 744

I turned north where two  
rivers, Ching and Wei merged;  
Rapid torrents gushed down  
from the west; a narrow bridge 748

barely withstood them.  
Dire refugees crawled over it,  
holding hands in fears  
of its loud cracking noises; I cursed 752

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

the river being so wide.  
Overcoming dangers and hardships,  
I reached my family  
at last. When I entered the gate, 756  
first greetings I heard  
were wild groans of grief, not shouts  
of joy; I learnt that  
our youngest son had starved to death! 760  
How could I refrain  
myself from crying aloud when  
even neighbours wept?  
I was bitterly ashamed of 764  
my inept fatherhood.  
Yet in our society, I was  
a privileged man:  
Excepted from harsh conscriptions, 768

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

ruthless abuses, and taxes.  
As my lot was such cruel,  
dire, miserable curses,  
how much worse our poor common 772  
people had to suffer  
in dire ineffable woes!  
I know too well how  
bloody taxes are misused; how brave 776  
soldiers are sacrificed  
as helpless, poor victims of  
our vile blind policies  
of greedy, ruthless expansions 780  
on perilous frontiers!  
Anxiety rises like enraged  
rivers in fierce spate;  
Turbulent wild upsurges swell, 784

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

impossible to abate.’

*Overwhelmed with deep sympathy,  
the meek pupil sobs.*

‘You weep for me, dear *Bright Moon*,’ 788

*says Du Fu in warm  
soft voice, ‘do you care to hear  
more about what I saw*

*how much our common people* 792

*suffered?’ ‘Yes, of course  
I do. I weep for myself  
as well as all others*

*you have cared for with your warm* 796

*deep compassion,’ says  
the pupil with devoted love.*

*Calm dusk deepens along*

*Yangtze River; bright full moon* 800

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*rises in sheer splendours.*

*Du Fu muses rapt in deep thoughts,*

*gazing at the moon*

*glittering on the river.*

804

*He resumes to chant*

*his moving incisive ballads:*

‘Army carts groan; horses neigh;

Soldiers march with bows and arrows.

808

Wretched wives weep; children cry;

Sad old parents rush to hold

their dear sons and bid

heartbreaking farewells in tears.

812

Rising dust blurs Hsien-yang

bridge as many battalions file

to cross it over. When

the crowds clutch at the uniforms

816



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

of their dear relations,  
shrill shirks pierce drifting dark clouds.  
A passer-by asks  
the soldiers: “*Who are you? Where are* 820  
*you headed?*” “*Just another*  
*conscripts;*” replies one, “*some of us*  
*were sent North at fifteen*  
*to guard the Yellow River;* 824  
*Now at forty, we go*  
*to fight in the Western Frontiers.*  
*We have bled enough bloods*  
*to bloat the ocean, while our* 828  
*emperor wants to*  
*expand his empire endlessly.*  
*Haven’t you heard that thousands*  
*of thousands of our farms are wasted* 832

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*in weeds? You are kind  
to ask of our harsh wretched fates;  
But how can we find  
the courage to recount our dire ills?* 836

*You know that Kwan-shi troops  
have never returned. The government  
collects bleeding taxes  
ruthlessly. But where are the taxes* 840

*to come from? Now, we  
realize that we should never  
beget sons; better  
to bring up daughters; given* 844

*in marriage, they may  
keep families. But sons are born  
to perish in wars;  
Don't you know that countless* 848

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*stark human bones are  
left unburied to bleach in the fierce  
sun near Kokonor?*  
*New ghosts wail while the old ones sigh.* 852  
*One can always hear them  
when night or rain comes.” The old  
soldier marched; he faded  
away into thick dusts, never* 856  
*to come back home alive.’*  
*Here pauses Du Fu drawing in  
deep heartrending sighs.*  
*‘Your poignant poem reminds me* 860  
*so vividly,’ cries*  
*the pupil, ‘of my own dreadful  
experiences of brutal  
military life. I feel your warm* 864

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

heartfelt sympathy  
for our poor oppressed people;  
Sing more for me your brave,  
moving, righteous indignations 868  
of this evil world;  
They comfort our bleeding hearts.'

*Du Fu resumes to  
recall what he has witnessed:* 872

'While travelling afar,  
I came across Shih-hao village,  
and stayed for a night.  
A conscripting officer 876  
appeared in late night  
to capture men for fighting  
in the frontiers. My old  
host scaled the wall and fled away; 880

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

His old wife went to  
answer the harsh officer.  
He roared while the weak  
woman implored in despair. 884

This is what I overheard  
her say: "*My three sons went to  
Yeh frontier. One wrote  
that two of his brothers were  
killed in the battle.*" 888

*My dead sons are forever gone.  
How long would the living  
one last? There is no more man  
left in my household,  
except a suckling grandson.* 892

*His mother stays home  
to nurse her babe; she cannot* 896

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*go outside because  
she hasn't any intact skirt to put on.  
Although I am old  
and of little use to fight, 900  
but I will go with you,  
officer, this very night: let me  
answer the urgent call  
from Ho-yang. I can at least 904  
cook meals for our men."*

Her heartbreaking voice faded in  
the deep silence of the night.  
I heard only her faint sobbing. 908

At dawn, I resumed  
my journey; only the old man  
waved farewell to me.'  
'I know very well of such harsh 912

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

heartless officials;’  
*says the pupil in indignation,*  
‘They suck bloods of good,  
helpless, miserable people 916  
with vile extortions.  
You have been the lone brave voice  
of our conscience that  
reveals evils of our vile 920  
rotten society  
with keen upright honesty.  
Please keep on sharing  
with me what you saw; it wakes 924  
up my conscience from  
numbness inflicted by evils.’  
‘Thank you, my dear son,’  
*says Du Fu,* ‘for your attentive 928

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

listening to sad  
stories told by this old waif.  
I saw an old man,  
dragged into frontiers of war, 932  
leaving his old wife  
in cold, hunger, and danger.  
This is what I heard him  
lamenting in dire despairs: 936  
*“There is no peace on  
all sides of our Capital;  
Hence, no rest for even  
an old man. My sons and grandsons 940  
have all perished in  
battles; what good is it for me  
alone to live? Throwing  
away my cane, I leave my old home; 944*



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*Even my comrades  
on the march grieve for me. I've  
a few teeth left, but  
the marrow in my bones is 948  
mostly gone. Once a man  
has put on the military  
uniform, he must salute  
young officer and obey his order 952  
to march. My aged wife  
lies on the roadside weeping;  
The year is late but  
her clothing is thin; I know 956  
well that we shall never  
see again; I worry about her  
shuddering in cold  
and hunger; she also knows that 960*

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*I can't come back alive;  
She still urges me to eat plenty  
and keep myself well.*

*The rampart of Tu-men is* 964  
*hard to sack; ferrying  
across to Shing-yuan is perilous.*

*Siege of Yeh is our*  
*predicament; I may be killed* 968  
*but not immediately.*

*Parting and reunion are  
the way of our life;*

*One cannot expect excuses* 972  
*for his age. When I*

*recall happy, youthful days  
of our married life,*

*I cannot help lingering* 976

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*a moment for deep sighs.  
The whole world suffers havoc.  
Battle fires blaze on  
every hill. Hot crimson bloods stain 980  
this cursed land; our woods  
stink of rotting human corpses.  
No place is safer  
than another; thus I may 984  
as well leave and cease  
hesitating. Yet to break up  
our long tie of love—  
Ah, I'm dying of dire broken heart!" 988  
A young sergeant came;  
He dragged the old man away from  
his stunned, heartbroken wife.'  
Warm tears pour down on both cheeks 992*

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*of Bright Moon in agony:*

‘Your revelation of such heartrending partings between old couples,’ <i>says he,</i>	996
‘moves me to cry with deep pity and to protest against evils of our cruel society. Have you	1000
also witnessed piteous separations forced on young new couples in love?’	
‘Yes, I did see,’ <i>says Du Fu,</i>	1004
‘such a heartbreaking parting of a newly wedded: When the bridegroom was snatched to the frontier of wars,	1008

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

his heartbroken bride  
lamented in utter despair:  
*“To marry a girl  
to a conscripted boy is worse 1012  
than casting her away  
on the dangerous roadside.  
With my hair knotted, I’m  
called your wife; but our nuptial 1016  
bed has hardly been warmed.  
Married in the evening and  
parting on the next  
morning—isn’t it too hurried? 1020  
I know you don’t have  
far to go, for you are to  
defend the frontier at  
Ho-yang. But since our marriage 1024*

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*is not consummated,  
how am I to pretend as  
a daughter-in-law?*

*When my parents brought me up,* 1028  
*they sheltered me inside  
our home. When they gave me away  
to be married, they didn't*

*expect me to be more lonesome* 1032  
*than a stray bitch or hen.*

*You are marching to perils  
of bloody cruel wars  
to be slain, while I suffer* 1036

*pangs of pains and woes  
left alone; if I insist on  
going with you, I*  
*might make the situation* 1040

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*much worse. You'd better  
forget about your bride, putting  
away tender feelings  
of our love; you must give yourself* 1044  
*to stern duties of war.*

*The presence of a woman  
in the army camp would  
hardly enhance the martial spirit.* 1048

*That is what you should  
now strive for. Tender feelings  
and gentleness of love  
are for a wife to live on.* 1052

*Now I should wash away  
the powder from my brow, rouge  
from lips. My silk dresses—  
ah, how long they took me to weave—* 1056

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*become useless now.*

*Do you see those birds in flight?*

*Large or small, they are*

*flying freely in loving pairs.* 1060

*Our human world has*

*gone awry; desperate longing alone*

*is left for you and me.”*

Her ineffable sobs still 1064

keep on resounding

deep in my sad throbbing heart.’

*Thus finishes Du Fu*

*chanting his moving ballads.* 1068

*He notices the pupil*

*weeping heartbroken, overwhelmed*

*by intense emotions.*

‘Why do you weep so bitterly, 1072



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

my son,' asks *Du Fu*  
in surprise, 'how did my poems  
wound your sensible heart?  
Tell me about your life; let us 1076  
share our joys and woes.'  
'My life has been too worthless  
to tell,' says Bright Moon,  
'yet I will be most happy, 1080  
if you would hear me  
confessing on it: Although  
I won some poetry  
contests, soon I realized that 1084  
it was futile follies  
to aspire any bureaucratic  
ambition: I was  
born as a bastard; no chance 1088

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

had I to compete  
with the nobles. I entreated  
my master to get  
a small farm for me; I worked 1092  
hard on it to earn  
my simple living in peace.’  
‘You avoided wisely,’  
*says Du Fu*, ‘vain ambitions 1096  
that ruined my cursed life.  
Did you continue writing  
poems while you worked  
on your farm?’ ‘Yes, I toiled on soil 1100  
from dawn to dusk,’ *says*  
*the pupil*, ‘but at night I strove  
to write down what I  
thought and how I felt in plain 1104

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

words.’ ‘Let me hear your  
poems about your farmer’s life.’

*The pupil recites  
his poem, elated in awe:* 1108

‘ “Ode to Spring  
*I toil to till bare, dry soils,  
greeting a new spring.*

*Little tender buds sprout out  
beneath old dead leaves.* 1112

*How wondrous it is to see  
sheer drama of life,  
unfolding its deep mystery* 1116  
*in such plain usual ways.*

*We all have come from the dust  
of past death; we shall  
return to it after a brief breath.* 1120

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*May our fleeting sojourns  
through the mystic cycles from  
the death to the life  
bloom into pure timeless songs* 1124  
*from our hearts to hearts.”*

This is the best that I could  
sing of my farm life.’  
‘Your simple and earnest song 1128  
sings deep to our hearts.

It reminds me of Tao Yuan Ming’s  
poems, entitled  
“*Returning to Farm to Dwell*,” ’ 1132  
*says Du Fu*. ‘I’m so

ignorant. Please teach me who  
he is and what he has  
written,’ *says the meek pupil.* 1136

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘He was our great poet-  
farmer; he gave up his office  
and worked on his farm.

He wrote simple yet sublime  
poems on nature,  
almost four centuries ago.

I revere him as  
the Poet of poets,’ *says*

*Du Fu.* ‘Please recite  
his poems so that I may  
grasp what you imply.’

‘With pleasure, I will recite  
the first of his five  
renowned poems, entitled:

“ Returning to Farm to Dwell  
*Since young I didn’t fit to worldly affairs;*

1140

1144

1148

1152

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*I had an innate love for hills and mountains.  
Fallen by mistake in the grimy traps of men,  
I have wasted meaningless thirty years.  
As trapped birds yearn to return free to woods, 1156  
and fishes put in pond long for vast home lakes,  
I toil to clear parcels of land in the south,  
simply settling back in my rustic farm.  
The area of my field is about ten 'myo.' 1160  
My thatched roof covers eight or nine 'gan.'  
Elm and willow trees shelter the back eaves.  
Peach and plum trees guard the entrance.  
Into hazes fade away bustling villages. 1164  
Idle smokes curl from sparse neighbours.  
Dog's bark breaks silence in lonesome lanes.  
Cocks cry high up on mulberry trees.  
My home is free from filth and mess. 1168*

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*The empty room is filled with leisure.  
After the long captivity in cages of men,  
finally, I've regained freedom in nature!'*

What does this poem remind 1172  
you of, *Bright Moon?* ' says  
*Du Fu, beaming gentle smile.*

'I miss the happy days,  
working on my little farm,' 1176  
*says Bright Moon in tears.*

'Don't you still keep your dear farm  
to cultivate your poems  
as well as nourishing crops?' 1180

'No!' *says the pupil*  
*in deep agony.* 'What happened?'  
'My idyllic dream  
of the pastoral life was 1184

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

shattered by ardent  
love affairs with a tender,  
noble maiden,' *says*  
*Bright Moon*. 'Who was your beloved?' 1188  
'*Red Rose*, the daughter  
of my master,' *says the pupil*.  
'Yes, as I have guessed.  
There must have been formidable 1192  
oppositions from her  
parents.' 'Yes! I was dragged to  
the army to be slain  
in frontiers of war.' *Bright Moon takes out* 1196  
*a neat scarf of silk,*  
*kept safely in his bosom:*  
*Timidly, he hands*  
*it to his mentor*. 'I see 1200



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

a beauteous pair  
of birds in love, embroidered  
in colourful silks.  
How lovely they look, even if 1204  
it is left unfinished!  
Isn't this a precious token  
of her love, engraved  
by your dear beloved, *Red Rose?* 1208  
'Yes. She gave it to me  
last time I saw her; she appeared  
suddenly amid crowds  
who sent off their kin, the new 1212  
conscripts to fight in  
frontiers of Tibet; it was,  
indeed, great pleasant  
surprises that she dared to come 1216

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

there to see me off!

Her grace and modesty blessed  
my humble life with  
ineffable bliss. I swore

1220

*Red Rose* that I should  
overcome all troubles, and come  
back to her to be

her loving, faithful husband,'

1224

*says Bright Moon in tears.*

'Ah how poignant to learn,' *says*

*Du Fu*, 'that you too

have suffered such heartbreaking

1228

miseries. How did you  
survive from cruel gory wars  
in harsh wild Tibet?'

'My life in our army was like

1232

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

living-deaths in hells:  
I was oppressed by our own  
countrymen as if  
I were a captive enemy. 1236  
Moral corruptions  
were rampant like lethal plagues.  
Dire shortages of food  
and essential supplies for 1240  
combat were shocking.  
When the Tibetans attacked,  
our soldiers fled away.  
But I kept my post until 1244  
wounded and then captured.  
Unexpectedly, a merciful  
Tibetan army officer  
rescued me with compassion. 1248

### *Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

When I recovered,  
I worked hard whatever chores  
he gave me with thanks.  
The pristine vista of vast  
open space in the North  
inspired me to ignore gruesome  
misdeeds of evil men.  
Humbly, I bore my fate with  
calm indifference.  
To soothe my lonesome, sad heart,  
I learnt their folksongs,  
and played them on flute. Somehow  
my playing touched hearts  
of many homesick foot-soldiers  
of the Tibetan troops.  
Soon we became good close friends:

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

We shared joys and woes  
in our common uncertain lives.  
One day at lunch break,  
I sketched magnificent mountains, 1268  
    decked with vast shining  
glaciers. As I felt someone  
    behind my shoulder,  
I turned: it was my revered 1272  
    kind saviour. Somehow  
he liked my drawing; he let  
me be free to paint.  
He gave me a splendid steed 1276  
    for my plain paintings  
of breathtaking grand landscapes.’  
‘I wonder,’ *interrupts*  
*Du Fu*, ‘who was such a wise 1280

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

man who happened to  
command the Tibetan troops.’  
‘He was a Buddhist monk;  
When his duty of armed service 1284  
was over, he returned  
to his monastery in Tibet,  
taking me with him.  
He encouraged me to pursue 1288  
the art of painting  
and writing poems as a way  
to enlightenment,’  
*says the pilgrim in cherished 1292*  
*memories.* ‘I’m so  
delighted that such a wondrous  
miracle happened  
in your eventful hard life! 1296

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

I wish to hear what  
you wrote about your new blessed life  
in Tibet,' says *Du Fu*  
*in sincere curiosity.* 1300

*Elated in awe, Bright Moon*  
*recites one of his poems:*

‘ “Communion  
*Lofty sublime peaks loom* 1304  
*afloat above subtle mists*  
*in ethereal twilights*  
*of a calm, pristine dawn.*

*They look rapt in deep* 1308  
*timeless meditations,*  
*waiting to be awakened*  
*in the enlightened realm.*

*The rising sun suffuses* 1312

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*magnificent summits.*

*Vast pristine glaciers glow  
ablaze with ardent passions.*

*A serene lake reflects* 1316  
*the numinous vista.*

*A humble soul breathes in  
the sacred spirit in a trance.*

*The inner voice of* 1320  
*pure conscience resounds  
deep in his meek soul:*

“Neither measure space  
nor count time; You are 1324  
in them, they in your mind.

All things inhere in each other.  
Flow freely into eternity.” ”

The magnificent beauty 1328



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

and the deep, sublime  
spirituality of nature  
sing to my meek heart,'  
*confides Bright Moon to his mentor.* 1332

'Your profound poem  
reminds me of Wang Wei,' says  
*Du Fu in pensive voice.*

'My dear mother revered him 1336  
as Poet-Buddha.

But I do not really know  
who Wang Wei is and  
what he has written; please teach 1340  
me his poetry,'

*pleads the meek pupil.* 'Wang Wei  
was the unique complete  
artist: he was a superb 1344

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

painter and excellent  
musician as well as sublime  
poet. I know no one  
who possessed such a wholesome 1348  
artistic talent  
as Wang Wei has accomplished.  
Following the noble  
tradition of Tao Yuan Ming, 1352  
Wang Wei sang of sublime  
beauty and deep mystery of  
nature, painting them  
vividly in the inner realm 1356  
of our mind,' *says Du Fu.*  
'Did he retire as a recluse  
to write such poems  
on nature?' *asks the pupil.* 1360

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘No. Somehow, Wang Wei  
managed to handle frenzied  
affairs of the Court,  
while he led a simple life 1364  
in his rural retreat  
near Chang An. His mystic life  
seemed to be an amazing  
reincarnation of his revered 1368  
Vimalakirti:  
The enlightened bodhisattva  
who remained as a layman  
to share miseries with common folks. 1372  
I admire Wang Wei’s  
pure poems and his austere way  
to enlightenment,’  
*says Du Fu with sincere respect.* 1376

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘Please recite his poems  
so that I may grasp the way  
to see deep into  
nature and his inner realm,’ 1380  
*pleads the meek pupil.*

*Du Fu looks up lofty heaven,  
as if invoking  
Wang Wei’s spirit to inspire him.* 1384

‘Listen to this terse  
quatrain written by Wang Wei:  
“How could man shed the dusty net,  
discard attire, leave the worldly din, 1388  
and simply ply twigs free from care  
to return to Peach Blossom Spring?”

What do you think about  
this poem, *Bright Moon?*’ asks Du Fu. 1392

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘Wang Wei alludes to  
Tao Yuan Ming’s “*Returning to  
Farm to Dwell*,” I think.  
But where is *Peach Blossom Spring*?’ 1396  
    *asks the pilgrim in wonder.*  
‘It is an imaginary  
ideal community  
of decent people who’d fled 1400  
    from vile tyranny,  
and settled in a hidden  
remote place and lived  
in peace, all conjured up by 1404  
    Tao Yuan Ming in his  
superb narrative prose-poem,  
entitled, “*Song of  
Peach Blossom Spring*,”’ says *Du Fu*. 1408

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘How much I wish to  
paddle a sleek skiff, gliding  
on pristine mystic streams,  
meandering along lush green banks 1412  
    where bloom peach trees afresh  
in graceful splendour: a happy  
naïve dreamer yearns  
to reach the hidden ideal 1416  
    realm beyond this world!’  
*exults Bright Moon in delight.*  
‘This quatrain which has  
invoked in you such a bliss 1420  
    was chanted by Wang Wei  
to his friend Pei Di when he  
had visited Wang Wei,  
imprisoned in Puti Monastery 1424

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

by the rebels of  
An Lu-shan; he wrote it on  
the back of a sutra,  
and gave it to Pei Di who 1428  
    preserved it,' *says Du Fu.*  
'Really? Wang Wei sublimated  
his personal agonies  
into the poem, and invites 1432  
    his readers to explore  
his deep, inner, ideal realm,'  
*says the pupil in awe.*  
'Very well, *Bright Moon*, let's suppose 1436  
    that you have come to  
the realm of *Peach Blossom Spring*,  
and meet hermit Wang Wei:  
He greets you with the next quatrain: 1440

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*“A light bark to greet the welcome guest,  
coming across the lake from a distant land.  
On the porch, each greets with goblets of wine.  
Lotuses are in full blossom all around here.”* 1444

How would you reply  
to your host Wang Wei?’ asks *Du Fu*.

‘I would salute him:

*“Poet-Buddha! Please lead me* 1448  
*to the way for inner*  
*awakening through your sublime*  
*poems,” ’ says the pupil.*

‘Wang Wei has immortalized 1452  
his secluded retreat

in Wang River Mountain Valley

in quatrains;’ says *Du Fu*,

‘Let us pretend that he shows 1456



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

you his haven through  
his poems: “ Huazi Hill  
*Flying birds have gone into the boundless.*  
*Linked mountains reflect autumn colour.* 1460  
*I climb up and down Huazi hill alone.*  
*What end is to these desolate feelings?” ’*  
‘I hear his wise voice,  
gently pervading his vivid 1464  
ethereal painting  
of nature. The viewer is  
brought to breathe in his  
intimate inner realm, and 1468  
to share the lonesome  
feelings of this sublime poet-  
painter,’ *says the pupil.*  
‘I wonder, *Bright Moon*, what you 1472

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

would see in his quatrain:

entitled, “ Deer Enclosure

*The mountains are empty; nobody is seen.*

*Only a vague voice seems to echo.* 1476

*Reflected rays penetrate deep woods,  
re-illuminating green mosses up.” ’*

‘I feel spiritual lights,

emanating deep from his mind,’ 1480

*says Bright Moon in trance.*

‘How will you respond to Wang Wei’s  
next quatrain, my son?

“Bird Call Valley 1484

*Man is in repose; wildflowers are falling.*

*Night is still; spring mountains are empty.*

*The moon rises, surprising mountain birds.*

*At times, their calls pervade vernal valleys.” ’ 1488*

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘I wonder who reposes  
deep in the mystic bosom  
of nature; Is it  
the very poet who has painted 1492  
such ethereal scenes?  
Or the viewers who hear his  
deep poetic voice?  
Or perhaps nobody beyond 1496  
our thought of being  
and non-being?’ says *Bright Moon*  
*in deep thoughts*. ‘The next  
quatrain is entitled: 1500  
“Streams at the Luans  
*Rain howls and gusts in autumn storms.*  
*Water rushes and thrashes onto rocks.*  
*Waves splash and crash on each other.* 1504

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*White egrets leap, then repose in calm.” ’*

‘Wang Wei points to us, I think,  
that everything changes  
in the endless flow of time: 1508

We are nothing but  
paltry fleeting froths on deep  
inner sea of mind.’

‘Now, hear Wang Wei’s pensive voice: 1512

“ Bamboo Hut

*Sitting alone in thick bamboo groves,  
I play the lute and chant from my heart.  
No one knows the mystery of deep woods. 1516  
Only the bright moon comes to illuminate.” ’*

‘I should hold my breath lest I  
disturb his meditation.

Yet how deep I yearn to speak 1520

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

with Poet-Buddha  
even in a fleeting dream,’  
*says the meek pupil.*  
‘Imagine, *Bright Moon*, that Wang Wei 1524  
lets you lodge a night  
in his hermitage and chants:  
*“Pink peach blossoms hold fresh raindrops.  
Lush green willows bear hazy spring mists. 1528  
Falling flowers scatter on the un-swept hut.  
Orioles chirp; the guest is still sound asleep.”*  
How would you respond  
to him?’ ‘I would say in thanks: 1532  
*“You have opened my eyes  
to see the pristine beauty  
of a pure raindrop,  
reflecting the whole inner 1536*

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*universe,” ’ says Bright Moon.*

‘Listen to Wang Wei’s next quatrain:

“ Red Peony

*Pristine beauty, tranquil and carefree;* 1540

*Pink garments, subtly light and deep.*

*But the flower’s heart may grieve to break;*

*Who knows her heart from its outer look?” ’*

‘How subtly the poet feels 1544

the tender heart of

a mute flower! I wonder

how warmly he would

comfort the lonesome heart of 1548

a wanderer astray

in this life with his boundless

compassion,’ *says Bright Moon.*

‘Hear Wang Wei’s heartfelt farewell: 1552

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

“ Lake Yi

*Flute tune pervades distant shores.*

*At sunset, I bid you farewell.*

*Looking back once from the lake—then gone.* 1556

*Azure hills roll into white clouds.”*

What feelings does Wang Wei call

to your mind, *Bright Moon?*’

‘I feel pangs of deep sorrows 1560

when I must bid you

farewell, Du Fu, after this

spiritual meeting.’

‘May our encounter inspire you 1564

to keep it timeless

in your poem, my dear son!

Next quatrain is called:

“ Magnolia Enclosure 1568

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*Autumn mountains embrace lingering lights.  
Birds in flight follow their leading companions.  
Azure lustre is limpid and distinct at times.  
Evening mists waft adrift nowhere to rest. ” ’* 1572

‘This poem makes me  
feel as if my body dissolved  
into mists, hovering  
over magnificent mountains. 1576

This may be the mystic realm  
where our being or non-being  
becomes meaningless?  
I confess that I do not know. 1580

Do you recall Wang Wei’s  
Buddhist poems that may enlighten me?’  
*asks the meek pupil.*

‘I will recite some;’ *says Du Fu,* 1584



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘You tell me whether  
they solve the profound mystery:

“ With Monks of Mt. Fufu

*Lately I learnt the pure, true principles;* 1588

*Daily more removed from worldly dins.*

*Awaiting monks’ visit from distant mountains*

*I cleanse my humble thatched hut.*

*They descend from cloud-shrouded peaks,* 1592

*and come to my meagre dwelling.*

*On grass mats, we feast on pine nuts,*

*burn incense and peruse books of Dao.*

*We light the lamp as daylight fades.* 1596

*We ring stone-chimes as the night looms.*

*I realize what a bliss solitude is.*

*Such a life surpasses mere leisure.*

*Why should I think of returning?* 1600

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*This body and the world are empty like the void.” ’*

‘Wang Wei expounds the mystery  
of abstruse *Sunyata*:

The ultimate reality 1604  
that transcends human  
reasoning in his poem!’

*exclaims the elated*  
*pilgrim.* ‘Now, hear his next one: 1608

“ Visiting Monk Xuan

*My youth is not worthy of mentioning.*

*When I saw Dao, I was late in age.*

*What use to regret past affairs,* 1612  
*if one can improve the rest of life?*

*I vow not to eat garlic and meat;*

*Never again to get tangled in worldly net.*

*Flouting fame, I will leave my office.* 1616

### *Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*Boundless nature has no restraining halter.  
I have followed this great spiritual teacher.  
Burning incense, I look up to him with reverence.  
He lives at ease in a simple room, 1620  
amid countless jumbled forms of this world.  
Orioles sing on tall willows at dawn.  
Spring rainfall echoes on the long verandah.  
At the foot of his bed is a pair of Ruan Fu's clogs; 1624  
In front of the window, a staff of bamboo stands.  
To see Buddha's hidden body-cloud  
I toil to overcome distracting phenomena.  
Resolutely inhering in Dharma, 1628  
I wish to realize non-rebirth. ” ’  
‘Transcending vicious cycles  
of birth and death in  
this Samsara to the lofty 1632*

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

state of non-rebirth  
*in Nirvana*: it is beyond  
my reach, and yet how  
deep I yearn for it even 1636  
in a fleeting dream,  
*confesses Bright Moon in deep trance.*  
‘Wang Wei reflected on  
his life in “*Six Casually* 1640  
*Written Poems.*” Their gists,  
I recall, are as follows:  
“*Old age has come; too lazy*  
*to write poems, I hold old age* 1644  
*my sole companion. In this life,*  
*I was mistaken as a poet.*  
*In a former life, I must have been a painter.*  
*Unable to discard the inherent habit,* 1648

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*as such, I have been known to the people.  
My name and cognomen are like that.  
But no one knows my true heart."*

*"No more questions on success* 1652  
*or failure in our life; it fleets  
like an empty daydream.  
Farewell to all fame of false names.  
Ambitions linger no more to hurt my heart." ' 1656*

*'How modest and honest  
his voice of pure conscience is!  
May it resound deep  
ever in my humble heart,' 1660  
says Bright Moon in awe.*

*'This is Wang Wei's terse epitome,  
I think,' says Du Fu,  
'of his mystic inner life: 1664*

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*“Hidden beneath cloudy peaks, I dwell.  
White clouds merge; azure mists  
dissipate in the fresh air; Cranes nest  
on tall pines, singing in the breeze: mystic 1668  
place where water emerges and ends.  
I sit still watching the clouds arising.  
Burning incense; reading books on Dao.  
Now I know my solitude exalts in bliss. 1672  
In the Realm of White Clouds, time never ends.” ’  
‘How much I wish to attain  
such an enlightened life!  
Where is the Realm of White Clouds? 1676  
Does Wang Wei meditate  
still in that place?’ asks Bright Moon.  
‘It isn’t in this world;  
And yet it exists in deep 1680*

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

sublime poetry  
of his profound imaginations.  
Wang Wei passed away from  
dins of this world to his own 1684  
pure *Realm of White Clouds*  
nine years ago; he expounded deep  
mystery of our life:  
“*Birth and death take their turns* 1688  
*like in a dream. Falling ill one sees*  
*one’s true state in nature.*  
*Being or non-being is nothing*  
*to argue; there is no single Dharma* 1692  
*that is real. There does not exist*  
*anything that is not empty.”*  
Do you understand  
what Wang Wei means, Bright Moon?’ 1696

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘It is too profound  
for me to grasp; it points to  
a way to inner  
awakening. I will devote  
my life to it when  
I return to my dear Buddhist  
monastery in Tibet,’  
*says Bright Moon resolutely.*

1700

1704

*Du Fu and the pupil  
muse silently rapt in deep thoughts.  
They gaze at the full moon,  
gleaming on the mystic water.*

1708

*At last, Du Fu breaks  
the silence: ‘You’ve found your true  
home at the monastery  
in Tibet, enduring harsh,*

1712



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

dire, and grave trials  
in your life, and overcoming them  
with prudent fortitude,  
earnest devotion and new hopes. 1716

I wish to learn about  
your spiritual father who  
has saved you in Tibet.’  
‘He calls himself as “*Nobody*”;

I don’t know his real name.  
I revere him as a Bodhisattva  
who revived my soul  
and body with fatherly compassion,’ 1724

*says Bright Moon with deep  
ineffable emotions.*

‘I wonder why you  
left your dear sanctuary in 1728

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

Tibet, and risked to  
visit Chang An in dire disasters  
and dreadful havocs?’

*asks Du Fu in a pensive voice.* 1732

‘After twelve years of  
my new happy life in Tibet,  
my mother appeared  
to me in my dream; she brought 1736

my beloved *Red Rose*  
with her and spoke in a stern tone:

*“Wake up, my Bright Moon!*  
*You must fulfil your sacred vow* 1740

*of faithful eternal*  
*love of your devoted Red Rose.*

*She has joined with me*  
*in heaven, no longer in* 1744

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*the dreadful hell of  
vile T'ang. Go back to Chang An  
to find out what happened.*

*Write earnest moving poems* 1748  
*to sing of sublime  
virtues of your beloved Red Rose!"*

Overwhelmed in awe and shock,  
I struggled to say something 1752  
but no word came out  
from my helpless dumbfounded heart.

Modest *Red Rose* lifted up  
her lovely eyes, beaming subtle 1756  
smiles sparkling in tears.

Suddenly, they disappeared  
from me in the strange dream.  
I struggled hard to suppress 1760

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

my anguishes, scolding  
me that the dream was a bad  
delusion of my poor,  
undisciplined, inane mind. 1764

But soon, my wise and  
perceptive saviour noticed  
my inner struggles;  
Frankly, I confessed to him 1768  
what tormented my heart.

He spoke: "*Good man of conscience,*  
*Bright Moon. You are free*  
*to go back to your old home.* 1772

*If you want to come*  
*back here with your beloved Red Rose,*  
*I will be happy*  
*to embrace you and your bride* 1776

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*as my dear children.”*

Revived by his compassionate  
mercy, I resolved  
to visit Chang An to face my fate. 1780

I vowed to be back  
to him with *Red Rose*, if she  
were alive and wished to  
wed me; If not, I would strive 1784  
to be his devoted  
disciple-monk at my true home.

For my risky adventure,  
he provided me with a good steed, 1788  
arms, provisions, and  
gold coins to meet urgent needs.

At last, I reached Chang An,  
enduring dire adversities.’ 1792

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*Here pauses Bright Moon in  
agony. ‘What happened?’ asks Du Fu.*  
*‘My Red Rose died! Her brave*  
father and three brothers were 1796  
all killed in fierce battles;  
Their mansion was burnt to ashes.  
When I found my dear aunt,  
she was shocked to see me alive. 1800  
At last, she recovered  
her breath and handed to me two  
old parcels; one was  
what my mother had left to me; 1804  
The other larger one  
was what *Red Rose* entrusted to  
my aunt to give me,  
if I happened to come back alive: 1808

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

It contained the sheets  
of my early childish poems  
which I had entrusted  
to *Red Rose* before I had to 1812  
depart to fight against  
Tibetans. But this sheet was  
my beloved *Red Rose's*  
first and last letter to me; 1816  
She wrote it the day  
before she met her tragic death!  
*Broken-hearted Bright Moon*  
*hands it to his dear mentor.* 1820  
*Glancing at it, Du Fu says;*  
'I must read this letter aloud  
to hear her warm, true voice:  
'Bright Moon, *my* Bright Moon! 1824

### *Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*You have gone, they say,  
to the other unknown world.  
I can't linger in  
this dreadful vile life, waiting  
for you in vain anymore.  
I will come to find you in heaven  
or hell to be with you.  
Will you love me as your wife?  
I can't write what I feel.  
I pray that I will see you soon.  
Your devoted Red Rose."* ' 1828

*Deeply moved in tears, Du Fu  
embraces his new pupil  
with heartfelt fatherly love:  
'My good son, Bright Moon!  
Remember always that you* 1832 1840



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

have a true poet,  
singing deep in you: Poets  
must sublimate all  
woes and joys in our fleeting, 1844  
uncertain, harsh life  
into pure moving poems  
that ennoble us  
to feel deep compassion for 1848  
the whole of humanity.  
Devote your life to write such  
poems to immortalize  
your faithful beloved *Red Rose!* 1852  
‘I erected for her  
a symbolic gravestone next  
to my mother’s; I wrote:  
“ *My Beloved Red Rose* 1856

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*Bless me to fulfil  
my sacred vow to write plain,  
earnest poems that sing  
of your gracious lofty virtue.* 1860

*Inspire and sustain me  
to overcome grave darkly trials  
in my hard, dire, and  
eventful life to complete* 1864  
*my tasks before I  
come to join you in heaven.*

*Yours ever, Bright Moon.”*  
But I realize that I lack 1868  
talent to carry out  
such difficult tasks. Teach me  
how to express what  
I feel deep at heart,’ *sobs* Bright Moon. 1872

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

‘You have the will and ken  
to write such poems, my son:  
Nobody can teach you.  
To improve our mind must we 1876  
write honest poems;  
Then distil them till they sing  
for the very heart from  
which they’ve come spontaneously. 1880  
Flamboyant poems  
are neither our lot nor goal;  
We must sing joys and  
woes of all creatures to share 1884  
our miseries and bliss  
with heartfelt warm compassion.’  
*Suddenly, Du Fu*  
*collapses.* ‘Death is knocking at 1888

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

my frail heart. You must have  
been sent by Heaven to comfort me  
at my end,' *whispers*

*Du Fu, then swoons. The astonished*  
*pupil realizes how*  
*gravely ill his mentor is.*

1892

*The moon disappears*  
*in clouds. He gently puts Du Fu*  
*to rest on his bed*  
*in the small cabin; he lights lamps*  
*to chase away darkly gloom.*

1896

*Praying for his recovery,*

1900

*Bright Moon read Du Fu's*  
*poems kept in the old chest.*

*He becomes so deeply*  
*immersed in Du Fu's sublime art*

1904

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*he forgets anxiety;  
He copies them on blank papers  
as if he carves them  
into his heart in elation:*

1908

“Quatrain (untitled 1)

River gleams azure; gliding birds look whiter.  
Mountains shine lush green; flowers look aflame.  
Another spring slips away in alien refuge.  
When could we return to our beloved home?”

1912

*The pupil chants following  
his avid flowing brush.*

“Quatrain (untitled 2)

1916

In lazy spring, nature exults in splendour.  
In balmy breezes, fragrances of flowers waft.  
As soils thaw, swallows hurry to build nests.  
On warm sands, birds of loyal love sleep in pairs.”

1920

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

“Quatrain (untitled 3)

Two brown orioles sing among shining willows.  
A flock of white egrets ascends to clear sky.  
This window holds the snow that has caped 1924  
Western Mountains for a thousand years.  
Beyond my gate are anchored the boats  
that can sail thousands of miles east of *Wu*.”

*The elated pilgrim copies* 1928

*Du Fu's exquisite*

*regulated verses in awe and thrill:*

“ Overnight in the *Chamber by River*

Evening pervades lonesome mountain paths. 1932  
I climb up this chamber close to *Water Gate*.  
Thin clouds drift on the edges of rugged cliffs.  
The moonlight dances with surging waves.  
A flock of cranes in flight moves in silence. 1936

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

A pack of howling wolves breaks the stillness.  
Endless worries of wars keep me sleepless.  
How helpless am I to amend this world!"

“ Autumn Ambiance 1940

Dew crystals injure maple forests in late autumn.  
Sombre mood prevails in *Wu* Gorge and Mountains.  
Vibrant waves of *Grand River* swell to the sky.  
Storm clouds over the pass descend at dusk. 1944  
Chrysanthemums make me weep in sad memories.  
To a lone tied boat, I attach my hope of going home.  
People haste to prepare winter clothing, pounding  
hard mallets in *White Emperor City* at sunset.” 1948

“ Two Swallows

A travelling family at mealtime  
is startled to see two swallows;  
They fly into our fragile hut, 1952

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

holding wet mud in their beaks.

We should share our shelter in need  
from the harsh inclement weather;

And endure together and overcome 1956  
struggles for survival in uncertainty.

Like us—poor humans—you also will  
raise your offspring amid wind and dust;

Like you, we have come from long hard ways. 1960

You will be leaving here next autumn;

If the human world survives, we too hope  
to leave this alien place for our dear home.”

“ Sick Horse 1964

Long and far I have ridden you along many  
desolate frontiers despite cold and perils.

You’ve toiled devotedly for me all your life.

Your old age and illness wound my sad heart. 1968



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

Your look is not unusual from others.  
But your good temper and loyalty last ever.  
Humble creature with noble spirit—you  
move me to chant deep heartfelt sympathy.” 1972

*Overwhelmed by sad, deep,  
ineffable emotions  
the meek pupil weeps.*

*His brush stops moving, clasped in* 1976  
*his trembling hand.*

*At last, the pupil resumes  
copying Du Fu's long  
poem on immortality:* 1980

“ Thoughts and Feelings  
Alone I sit still through deep night.  
Moonbeams bathe this old frail body.  
Sudden gusts seem to upturn *Heavenly River*. 1984

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

Streaks of rising sun shed on the rooftop.  
Various creatures awoken from sleep  
will fly or crawl to toil in pairs or groups.  
I too shall drive my sons to work, 1988  
and to hoard with selfish purposes.  
In cold weather, travellers are rare.  
Time moves fast towards the close of the year.  
Because humans were inflamed with passions 1992  
for greed, pride, and fame, the world degraded  
like swarms of devouring insects and wild beasts.  
Long, long ago, before our history began,  
humans were content with simple free living. 1996  
Why should government and education arise  
to ensnare humanity in harsh dejected prisons?  
The first criminal was the man who used fires;  
Graver perils were made up by the historians, 2000

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

presuming to record what was right or wrong.  
You see, the lighting of lamps and candles  
attracts hundreds of flying moths to death.  
Let one's spirit soar up beyond this world; 2004  
He will see above and below just one stillness.  
To understand the ultimate unity of coming  
and going—of life and death—, is this not  
exactly the very secret of immortality?" 2008

*The pensive pupil  
pauses to ponder what Du Fu  
has expounded in his  
profound poem. At this moment, 2012  
Du Fu opens his eyes,  
and speaks in a warm voice: 'Hear me,  
Bright Moon, what I saw  
in a wondrous dream.' 'O, you 2016*

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

have come back to life,  
my poet of immortality!  
Please impart to me  
your numinous dream so that 2020  
I may keep it deep  
in my heart,' *says elated* Bright Moon  
*in delight and thanks.*  
'In my dream appeared Li Bai,' 2024  
*says Du Fu.* 'Really?  
What did you converse with your  
cherished old friend?' *asks*  
*the pupil in thrills.* 'It was 2028  
very mysterious.'  
*says Du Fu in pensive mood,*  
'The bright full moon rose  
on *Grand River*; a dark spot 2032

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

    moved from the moon's disc,  
as if it were descending  
towards me; a mystic  
skiff from lofty heavenly sphere                   2036  
    glided on the river  
with flashing speed like a noble crane  
in a wondrous flight.  
It gently berthed to my boat                   2040  
    as birds alight on sleek branches.  
    *"O peerless Li Bai!"* I hailed  
him in pleasant surprises,  
    *"How did you descend here from*                   2044  
    *the lofty transcendent realm?*  
*Parted in this harsh life, how much*  
*I longed to see you!"*  
    *"My dear friend, Du Fu!"* said he,                   2048

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*"I came to see you,  
and to enjoy in sharing  
our love of poetry  
as we did in good olden days."* 2052

*"How deep I cherish  
those exciting adventures  
with you," said I, "free  
from cares in my youthful liberty!"* 2056

*"Let us celebrate,"  
said he, "this rare reunion.  
Like drifting clouds, we  
wander through our fleeting lives"* 2060

*until dead; then we  
finally come to our true home.  
In one quick journey  
between the earth and heavens,* 2064

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*the dusts of countless  
generations of mankind heave.*

*My spirit lives in*

*the other realm: the mystic*

2068

*sphere that no one owns.”*

*“Li Bai, my dear revered friend,”*

*said I, “your noble*

*transcendent genius uplifts me*

2072

*to breathe in vibrant*

*vitality of life. Yet your*

*noble ideals are*

*beyond the reach of my grasp;*

2076

*I am a humble*

*earthly creature, creeping on*

*dusty clods: a wretched waif*

*forlorn in endless miseries*

2080

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*of this world. I saw  
terrible crimes of vile rulers,  
horrors of gory wars,  
and dire miserable sufferings* 2084  
*of so many good kind  
people! Yet I'm so helpless;  
Nothing can I do  
but sigh heart-breaking laments."* 2088  
*"My dear friend, Du Fu,"  
said he, "I hail you our greatest  
Poet-Saint! You've sung  
for all peoples suffering* 2092  
*in this harsh life on earth.  
Your earnest poems comfort  
deep our hearts and souls.  
Your warm compassion moves all:* 2096



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*Heaven as well as  
the peoples. Do not despair,  
Du Fu! I feel your  
compassionate heart throbbing in me.* 2100

*Your earnest poems  
will flow from hearts into hearts  
through all ages. Please keep on  
exalting your sublime poetry!”* 2104

*“Your kind words, Li Bai,”  
said I, “heal deadly wounds deep  
in my heart. When I chant  
earnest poems, I feel the Spirit* 2108

*draw near and revive  
my soul. Why should I worry  
about how this fleeting life  
fares? I would open my heart and let* 2112

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*my blood flow to feed  
and comfort my dear fellow  
suffering people.”*

The bright full moon was shining 2116  
on the Grand River.

*“Behold the full moon shining  
in splendour!”* said Li Bai,

*“Let us drink fine, fragrant wines,  
and chant to glorify*

*this bright moon to our heart’s content.*

*Our uncertain life  
fades away like a fleeting dream.* 2124

*Why gnaw our wretched heart  
all in vain? Be rich or poor;*

*high or low; long or short;  
joy or woe—every affair* 2128

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*of our life has been  
allotted as such by nature.  
Fragrant good wines will  
even out both life and death  
all the same; they help  
forget paltry earthly things,  
even high Heaven.*

2132

*Often, I wonder whether  
‘I’ ever existed!”*

2136

We offered a libation  
to the moon and drank  
the fragrant wine to rejoice  
our happy reunion.

2140

The good wine heightened our moods  
to pure ecstasy.

The moonlit river glittered

2144

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

in mystic beauty.  
Suddenly, it came to my mind  
to ask Li Bai about  
your parentage, dear *Bright Moon*: 2148  
Pointing to the moon  
shining on flowing water,  
I said to Li Bai:  
“*Do you remember your son,* 2152  
*a lovechild of yours, named*  
*Bright Moon?*” “*What? My lovechild,*  
*called Bright Moon?*” said Li Bai  
in surprise, “*our first son by* 2156  
*my first wife, I named*  
*Bright Moon; but he died when he*  
*was just an infant.*  
*How could he come back to this* 2160

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*world through a secret  
lover I knew not? Our good wine  
makes you drunken, Du Fu,  
to make up such nice cheerful jokes.”* 2164

*“I may well be wrong,”  
said I, “but didn’t you fall in  
passionate love with  
the graceful and cultured dancer,  
called White Lotus, while  
you worked at Imperial Court?”* 2168

*“Yes, I dearly loved  
White Lotus, the artistic dancer.”* 2172

*She was an intelligent  
beauteous lady with honest,  
keen sensitivity:  
She criticized that my poems* 2176

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*were too flamboyant,  
pompous, and bold. She admired  
Wang Wei's meditative  
serene poems on nature;* 2180

*And yet, the more she  
criticized me, the deeper  
I fell in love with  
wise perceptive White Lotus!"* 2184

said Li Bai in earnest.  
"Did you know that she brought forth  
a son, and named him  
Bright Moon?" asked I. "What? I wonder 2188  
by whom?" said Li Bai  
in surprise. "She wrote her son  
that a great poet  
was his father." "There were so 2192

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*many superb poets*  
*who fell in love with her in Chang An.*  
*Wait! It could be Wang Wei,*  
*I guess,” said he. “But Wang Wei was* 2196  
*a recluse, wasn’t he?”*  
*said I. “My dear friend, Du Fu,*  
*who could really know*  
*the deep abyss of woman’s* 2200  
*secret love? In any case,*  
*let us celebrate the birth*  
*of Bright Moon, the son*  
*of my adored White Lotus!”* 2204  
*said Li Bai in sheer*  
*exultation. Bowing humbly*  
*to the sacred moon,*  
*he exalted her deep mystery:* 2208

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*“Let us glorify  
the moon shining upon us:  
We can’t see the old moon  
of a time, which has flown past; 2212  
But this very same moon,  
in timeless, subtle ways, has shed  
her light for everyone  
since time immemorial. 2216  
Our fleeting life flows  
in the river of time as water  
flows to immense seas.  
Yet the moon sees everything 2220  
passing in ceaseless  
mystic flows.” While Li Bai chanted  
his lofty hymn to the moon,  
I saw in it the looming faces 2224*



*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

of my dear family.

O, may I see them again before

I pass away like winds!’

*Du Fu looks up the full moon,* 2228

*illuminating the earth.*

*Warm tears swell deep from his heart.*

‘What happened next,’ asks

*the pupil, ‘in your wondrous dream?’* 2232

‘Suddenly, Li Bai

exulted: “*Let us catch the moon!*

*Ascend to Heaven,*

*and breathe in the infinite!”* 2236

Awakened from my reveries,

I asked Li Bai: “*How can we*

*ever catch the moon?”*

“*Lo, Du Fu! Here comes for me* 2240

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*the sacred phoenix!*  
*I am a madman, ” said he,*  
*“singing of sorrows*  
*and joys. This cruel age crushed* 2244  
*my lofty ideals. Yet,*  
*my songs will live forever.*  
*O glorious Moon,*  
*let my soul soar up to you,* 2248  
*and rejoice in your*  
*chaste gracious bosom with bliss!”*  
Unexpectedly, Li Bai  
jumped off the skiff, as if he tried 2252  
to catch the lofty moon,  
reflected on the mystic river.  
Once gone, there’s no trace  
of Li Bai! In shock of sorrows, 2256

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

I swooned. When I regained  
my sense, I saw a noble bird  
flying to the moon.

Humbly, I prayed to the bird:

2260

*“O supreme poet  
from the transcendent mystic realm,  
you return to your home*

*of eternity! Your sublime*

2264

*poems will transcend  
passages of time; your noble  
spirit will inspire us*

*to breathe in Dao!” Then I awoke*

2268

*from the wondrous dream.’*

*Thus finishes Du Fu relating  
his numinous dream.*

*The keen perceptive pupil*

2272

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*is deeply moved by  
the strange ethereal story of  
Du Fu's mystic dream.*

*The serene strange night deepens* 2276  
*in eloquent silence.*

*Suddenly, a bright shooting  
star falls down nearby  
in awesome magnificence,* 2280  
*stunning the meek pupil.*

‘Behold, *Bright Moon*, my dear son!

Time has come for me  
to depart for the other realm,’ 2284  
*speaks Du Fu in calm*

*solemnity, ‘I see your mother,  
gracious White Lotus,  
amid the myriad shining stars.* 2288

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

She is descending  
from the celestial river,  
gently accompanied by  
your beloved faithful *Red Rose*; 2292

They bid me to join  
with them in the heavenly sphere!  
I am so thankful  
to you, *Bright Moon*, that you strove 2296  
to find and bless me  
at my end!’ *Overwhelmed by deep*  
*ineffable emotions*

Bright Moon *cries out*: ‘I wish to 2300  
follow you to be with  
my *Red Rose* and my mother!’

‘No, not yet, my son!  
You must bring forth what you feel 2304

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

into earnest poems  
as you've vowed. Stay in this world  
to fulfil your sacred vows:  
Return to your lofty mountains 2308  
in Tibet. I hope  
to meet and venerate, someday,  
your Tibetan saint,  
holy "*Nobody*" in heaven. 2312  
Devote yourself to write  
pure, simple, earnest poems  
deep from your heart and soul!  
With courage, prudence, and hope, 2316  
sail across the mystic sea  
of being to reach the sublime.  
Farewell, my *Bright Moon*!  
*The noble visage of Du Fu* 2320

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

*glows with mysterious  
spiritual lights. 'You are my true  
poet, my dear father!'*

*weeps the pupil elated in awe* 2324  
*and sorrow, holding*

*Du Fu with warm filial love*  
*while he gently draws out*  
*his final breath from this world.* 2328

*Limpid moonlight suffuses*  
*the boat-hut adrift on the river.*

*Eloquent silence*  
*prevails in this ethereal scene.* 2332

*Overwhelmed by heartfelt*  
*grief, awe, and strange elation,*  
*the meek pupil prays:*

*'Poet of conscience, Du Fu!* 2336

*Du Fu with his Last Pilgrim*

Your heartfelt true songs  
will ever move all peoples,  
through timeless mystic  
inner rivers, flowing deep  
in pure human hearts.'

2341

**The End**





## Epilogue

The present work is a fiction, not a learned biography. But it was inspired, nurtured, and sustained by the sublime poetry of my revered and beloved Chinese poets: Dù Fǔ [杜甫] (712–770), Wáng Wéi [王維] (701-761), Lǐ Bái [李白] (701-762), and Táo Yuān Míng [陶淵明] (365–427).

[A] The content of what the character Du Fu says in this fiction has been based on the classic Chinese texts of the relevant poems, written by the poet Dù Fǔ [杜甫] (712–770), cited in the following references:

{1} Hung, William (1952). *Tu Fu: China's greatest poet*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

This scholarly book provides the comprehensive biographical information and historical contexts of the 374 selected poems of Dù Fǔ's [杜甫], translated into English prose. The autobiographical utterances of Du Fu, in this fiction, were based on this book.

{2} Chang, Gi Kwon (1975). *Du Bo [杜甫] (Bilingual texts in Chinese and Korean)*. Tae Jong Publisher, Seoul, Korea.

For each one of the 90 poems of Dù Fǔ's [杜甫], selected in his book, Prof. Chang provides its Chinese text written in the classic characters, pronunciations in Korean, detailed exegesis, interpretation-translation in Korean, and discusses the presumed date, place, personal situation, and historical context of its composition.

The rendition of Du Fu's poems into English in this narrative has been mostly based on this crucial Chinese-Korean bilingual reference.

[B] The poems of other Chinese poets which Du Fu recites for his new pupil *'Bright Moon'* to learn and appreciate in this fiction have been based on the following bilingual Chinese-Korean references:

{3} Chang, Gi Kwon (1975). Li Bak [李白] (Bilingual in Chinese and Korean)  
Tae Jong Publisher, Seoul, Korea.

{4} Cha, Ju Hwan (2001). Doe Yuong Myong [陶淵明] (Bilingual in Chinese and Korean).  
Seoul National University Press, Korea.

{5} Park, Sam Su (1993). Shi Bul Wang Yu [王維] (Bilingual in Chinese and Korean).  
Se Gey Publisher, Seoul, Korea.

[C]           The other characters in this fiction, such as the pilgrim, called '*Bright Moon*,' who converses with Du Fu to the end; his mother, '*White Lotus*'; his beloved, '*Red Rose*'; and the Tibetan monk, '*Nobody*' were invented to make this fictional story sensible. What they say or do in this narrative are purely imaginary.

[D]           The quaternary stanza of this poem tries to simulate the Chinese poetic form: five or seven monosyllabic words per line. This is not an English poem with the proper accentual prosody. Nevertheless, this strange syllabic writing is what its author could try best in his pidgin English to sing of the sublime poetry of his revered and beloved Chinese poets in earnest.

[E]           The cover photograph of the rising full moon on the horizon was taken in Nova Scotia, Canada, by the author.

Art Aeon



